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U. S. Department of Agriculture

Monday, February 22, 1937

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MORE NEWS FROM THE RIVER FRONT." Facts from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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Seven hundred miles of flooded river front along the Ohio are the setting for today's report from the Federal Food and Drug Administration.

Just imagine, if you can, a huge warehouse, three blocks long and half a block wide. . . flooded up to the second floor. . . a warehouse full of sugar, flour, coffee, butter, cheese, canned goods, fresh fruits and vegetables. . . every kind of food and drink -- and medicine -- used in the American home.

Imagine all that food and medicine soaked in filthy, slimy flood water. . . multiply that warehouse by several hundred. . . add hundreds of submerged freight cars and grocery stores and feed stores and drug stores, and you'll have some idea of the stupendous job food and drug inspectors are up against this month. For it's their duty to see that no flood-contaminated supplies are put on the market, to be sold to unsuspecting consumers.

The amount of food that had to be destroyed, to protect residents in the stricken cities, was "inconceivable," according to one of the Federal inspectors just returned to Washington.

"For example," he said, "in Cincinnati we dumped several hundred carloads still in the box cars in which it had been shipped. We destroyed an even greater amount stored in warehouses. One of our big problems was to find a place to dump damaged food. In some cities we covered huge piles of food with kerosene and set fire to it. In other cities we piled damaged food on the city dump and put guards around it to see that it was not salvaged.

"Imagine destroying 134 carloads of perishables such as lettuce, spinach, apples, and oranges. Or \$17,000 worth of pickles in brine, or more than 130 tons of slime-coated coffee."

As soon as this particular inspector arrived in Cincinnati he was told that a certain manufacturer was reconditioning flood-damaged coffee, in a plant on the edge of the high river. The inspector started out to investigate. He hired a boat, and a boatman who rowed him across four blocks of water, "in a stiff current." On their way to the coffee plant they passed by the tops of street signs, pieces of houses floating in the water -- window sashes, tops of freight cars, one complete trailer body. The inspector and his oarsman rowed up to the front door of the coffee plant, and into the main office. The boat got stuck in a doorway. There the food inspector disembarked and a man in hip-boots carried him, pick-a-back, to a stairway which led to the sixth floor.

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And on the sixth floor was what the inspector had come to investigate -- thousands of tons of flood-soaked coffee, spread out on the floor. The man who was "reconditioning" the dirty coffee was running it through a roaster -- heating it just enough to dry it out.

"What are you planning to do with the coffee, after it's reconditioned?" the inspector asked. The man in charge hadn't quite decided, but he thought maybe he could export it, if he wasn't permitted to sell it in the United States.

The inspector took a handful of the slimy, filthy, dirty coffee, put it in a glass, let it settle for a minute -- and the bottom, he says, "was covered with filth. Even if that coffee had been reconditioned, roasted at a safe temperature, all of us who drank it would have been drinking coffee plus sterilized sewage."

But the manufacturer agreed to dump the coffee -- a total of 120 tons

Druggists, too, are taking a terrific loss. A federal official, after inspecting a drug store in West Virginia, reported to headquarters: "It is one sorry mess -- a jumbled mass of the thousand and one items carried in a retail drug store -- cartons, bottles, boxes, jars, all covered with slimy mud."

As was to be expected, states our correspondent, responsible storekeepers, food manufacturers, retail and wholesale food dealers are cooperating splendidly with health authorities -- local, State, and federal. If it weren't for the unethical minority -- the scavenger -- the man-without-a-conscience -- it would not be necessary for such warnings as the following, issued to inspectors in the flooded cities by Mr. Postle (pronounced Postal), Chief of the Cincinnati Station of the Food and Drug Administration. Said Mr. Postle:

"You will be bothered by people coming to your towns and offering to buy flood-damaged foods and drugs. Such scavengers deserve small sympathy and are entitled to prompt action on your part. I suggest that if you observe any such activity you immediately contact your cooperating local officials, advise them of what you have observed, and suggest that a policeman pick up the man and take him up for a conference with city officials. They will undoubtedly explain to this gentleman that they do not permit anyone to foist this flood-damaged food on the inhabitants of their city -- neither do they propose to permit the material to be hauled to some other city, for possible human consumption," concluded Chief Postle.

Of course, Federal inspectors are not destroying any property that can be saved. Their job is to see that scavengers do not sell polluted food and medicine.

And with all the cooperating agencies -- federal, State, and local -- working together to see that all contaminated food and medicine are destroyed, scavengers have little success in the flooded sections. Early this month, Dr. Bundesen, President of the Chicago Board of Health, wrote this letter to Food and Drug inspectors in Chicago:

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"I am requesting that you use all the means at your disposal, to the end that the Board of Health of the City of Chicago may be apprised of any suspicious foods shipped by freight, express, or motor truck, so that control, from a public health standpoint, of any possible deliveries here may be exercised without delay."

In Cincinnati, huge advertisements inform the people that all perishable foods, soaked by the flood, are being destroyed, and that only new, wholesome perishables are being offered for sale.

Those who suffered financial loss are taking it optimistically, according to one of the thirty federal men who covered the water front -- they're all "good sports," with their eyes on the future rather than on the disastrous past.

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